

ANATHEMA

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ISSUE IV

ON ACTION, INDIVIDUALISM, AND OTHER ANARCHIST MATERIALISMS

I.

"Who wants to watch will continue to watch. Who doesn't want to act, justifying themselves politically, will continue not to do so. We are not awaiting any train of hope, we're not waiting for better times. The conditions move with the confrontation. Movement is only such if one acts; if not it stays still."

-Santiago Maldonado Cell, FAI-IRF

This article responds to a very tired yet endlessly reiterated critique of anarchists, the one that says

["On Action..." cont. pg. 2]

SCIENCE, THE NEW NOBILITY

There have been obvious concerns over the recent scandal involving Facebook selling account information that was useful in influencing the way people voted in 2016, however worthless attempting to choose your leader might be. Users had already expressed concern over the tailoring of information presented them on the site, putting them in algorithm-crafted bubbles that controlled what information they were able to see during the election cycle, before it was even publicly acknowledged what profit and control-driven companies and governments can and have done upon obtaining the same information (including the details of "private messages," according to

["Science..." cont. pg. 8]

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WHAT WENT DOWN

[“On Action...” cont. from pg. 1]

February to April: The Summer of Rage preseason softball team sabotaged ATMs, rental bikes, wrote anti-gentrification graffiti on North Philly construction sites in solidarity with the anti-stadium struggle, and sabotaged the toilets of OCF cafes. “We hope Ori knows a good plumber. Have a great summer.”

Late March: Anarchist graffiti against yuppies and condos in South Philly.

Early April: Pipeline construction machinery sabotaged in Exton, PA. “We feel called to fight for the natural world and would be lazy to submit to the demise of the earth, animal and self by not fighting against its destruction by machines and corporations who seek to kill it for capitalist growth.”

Early April: OCF Realty office at 20th and Washington has some of its windows smashed. “I opened the windows a crack to let in the night air...oh right, they were the windows of gentrifying OCF Realty’s main office” “(‘) /”

Early April: Condo building tagged on 46th and Baltimore.

April 2: Demonstration in solidarity with Afrin and the Kurdish struggle in Rojava at City Hall.

April 9: Vigil for Stephon Clark in Center City.

April: After being doxxed by Philly Antifa, Daniel McMahon is visited at home in Florida by antifascists.



they’re obsessed with taking action for the sake of action, with no attention to their historical conditions. We see people of literally every political stripe trying the same failed strategies over and over again, so it’s hard to pin that tendency to one particular ideology. We’re more interested in exploring how some anarchists understand the relationship of theory to practice, the historical conditions under which the imperative to act has renewed its force and become the very foundation of certain anarchist currents today, and why anyone in today’s highly pacified world decides to act at all. What we will mostly be doing is attempting an explanation of some of the insights contained in that seemingly reductive imperative to act.

Being attentive to historical conditions can simply mean asking critical questions about the struggles and actions one is engaged in: What is this action doing? How is this struggle playing out historically? What is possible in this time?

The development of an anarchist insurrectionary tendency is a response to these questions. While those of the communist persuasion tend to position themselves explicitly in response to questions about historical conditions, they seem to often live up to their reputation of answering them in such a way that leads to inaction. Contemporary insurrectionary anarchy instead engages with the conditions of possibility in such a way that allows direct struggle to continue, i.e. under conditions in which the state has mostly stamped out the memory of prior struggles and crushes any new struggles with increasing severity.

Some of insurrectionary theory’s basic insights, such as the importance of anonymity and clandestine attack, a refusal to align with leftists and reformists, a lack of interest in quantitative struggles that focus on building a movement, for example, have come from directly experiencing limits due to state repression and the masses’ opinions, and responding accordingly. While people engage in insurrectionary struggle for a variety of reasons, insurrectionary anarchy offers a strategy that attempts to make sense of its time.

It also has its limits — for example, the self-isolation that invariably accompanies a praxis based on clandestinity and illegalism. Insurrectionaries have attempted to avoid this by doing things that can spread (or that are already being done by other people — for example, in Philly, responses to gentrification tend already to be based around graffiti, paint, broken windows). The ways in which insurrectionary anarchy spreads and deepens in different places are not quantifiable, predictable or manageable in the way that recruiting people for a formal organization is supposed to be, so the tendency has often been dismissed by organizers who fail to grasp the strategy or the ways in which insurrectionaries around them are quietly supporting them in struggle and opening up space, whether as small groups or in rowdy demos, to create more possibilities for more people.

The turn to individualist and anti-social anarchist praxis, a tendency that has deepened over the past fifteen years especially through armed international informal organizations like Conspiracy Cells of Fire (CCF) and the FAI/IRF (the Informal Anarchist Federation), is likewise a response to anarchist experimentation with conditions of possibility, though its proponents would not necessarily articulate it as such. In situations in which attempts to spread insurrectionary struggle have often produced few initiatives amongst people who could choose to remain comfortable or survive through other means, it makes sense to instead concentrate on deepening ideas and practices with other already-minded people with a similar projectuality. Groups like the FAI and CCF emphasize the need to create the conditions that will make this deepening possible.

All this is to say that an understanding of historical conditions is embedded in these tendencies' praxis — and praxis does not mean organizing via a keyboard, or joining a formal organization in order to "organize people" or deal with a particular issue. We can only understand the conditions we live in — the resources and strategies of capital and other enemies, which tactics and strategies can spread, how different groups of people think or react, what risks people are willing to take, and so on — by engaging in them ourselves.

Hence the anarchist injunction to act now that has been so radically misunderstood by communists and other radicals. While it appears to confirm their notion that anarchists are voluntarists on a hopeless adventure that has nothing to do with reality, beginning by taking action is what most anarchists have found to be the only way to begin a serious interrogation of reality, the reality of what's possible — both in ourselves and in our time.

II.

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." — Marx, 18th Brumaire

Insurrectionary anarchists also understand that our relationship to the circumstances from which we act goes the other way as well — our actions also shape the conditions we find ourselves in. This reciprocal aspect of the dialectic seems to have gotten somewhat lost in communist varieties of materialism, which have focused more on determinism.

It is not only that "the conditions move with the confrontation" — it is also that one's individual decisions can help create the conditions of possibility. Observing this through experience is part of what leads to the much-maligned individualist emphasis on the will. As Alfredo Cospito of FAI-IRF notes, "Conditions are ripe when desire overcomes fear... The more so, when revolt creates communities through complicity with other individualities, in that case our strength increases a hundredfold and proportionally our pleasure grows. Only people of praxis can understand the true potential of the will: what seems impossible is carried out, desperate actions become an example reinforcing other desires."

III.

Communists have consistently misunderstood the materialist rationale behind the anarchist

imperative to action, despite having a similarly materialist approach to political engagement...in theory.

Anarchists are easy targets for intellectual critics because of their notorious refusal to read Marx and their outrageous belief that correct praxis does not necessarily stem from the right amount of book learning. Critics have inferred, as a result, that anarchists instead have no strategy or situational awareness at all. This is certainly the case for many anarchists who pursue the same tactics over and over again with seemingly no ability to position their activities within broader macroeconomic realities or to assess whether their reformist projects are really contributing to anti-authoritarian struggle. Guy Debord's well-known assertion to this effect, though, attempts to demonstrate that ahistoricism is inherent and universal in anarchism by quoting Bakunin writing in 1873: "During the past nine years, more ideas have been developed within the International than would be needed to save the world...and I challenge anyone to invent a new one. It is no longer the time for ideas, but for facts and acts." Debord concludes from this that anarchism "leaves the historical terrain by assuming that the adequate forms for this passage to practice have already been found and will never change" — something that Bakunin does not say. In the cited quote, Bakunin is instead acknowledging that he and his comrades have overthought what to do at the expense of doing things, and that enough ideas have been developed in this time to start acting on them. Such a statement would seem to affirm, rather than violate, a materialist approach in which ideas and action inform one another.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of communists have themselves been attempting the same strategies over and over for more than a century. This has made it necessary for certain theorists associated with the "communization" tendency today to intervene in the rest of their comrades' seeming inability to factor analysis of changing socioeconomic conditions into their proposals for action.

Communization theorists have sought to point out that classic communist strategies like building the party and organizing a workers' movement

have become irrelevant and ineffective given the restructuring of labor and production that has been going on since the 1970s. In arguing this, theorists have had to acknowledge that insurrectionary anarchists like Alfredo Bonanno developed "something like a communization thesis" independently in the 1980s. The group Endnotes writes: "Yet [Bonanno and others] tended to understand it as a lesson to be applied to every particular struggle. As Debord says of anarchism in general, such an idealist and normative methodology 'abandons the historical terrain' in assuming that the adequate forms of practice have all been found." So again we return to Debord's original, inaccurate analysis, but this time with an additional mischaracterization of Bonanno, whose preface to *Armed Joy* actually begins by advising the reader to consider how historical circumstances have changed since the book's original publication.

Communists are those who proclaim themselves to be materialists, while anarchists don't waste time claiming to be something they're already doing.

IV.

"Society exists under the sign of [...] dominants and those who allow themselves to be dominated. It is certain that the responsibility lies on each side..."
— Alfredo Cospito

Individualist anarchist thought becomes relevant at the limits of the materialist tradition — communist and communization theory cannot explain why some people decide to engage in struggle and others do not. Communization theorists rightly assert that it is not possible to decide for other people or in advance how the revolution will go down, and their analysis of macroeconomic trends and insurgencies does not claim to extend to an individual's decision to fight. Individualist anarchy — which lays emphasis on a person's ability to renounce fear and resignation and confront what destroys them, and the necessity of doing so in order to move towards liberation — has renewed relevance today, as class and identity positions seem to have become less predictive of whether someone will rebel. Hence the anarchists who have arrived at an emphasis on personal responsibility and decisiveness — something no one else can do for you, not even communists. ★

AMAZON WATCH

Amazon has recently opened a "Prime Now" delivery service location in the Philadelphia area. This is a newer venture from the monopolistic technocrats that offers delivery of everyday sundries and prepared meals from restaurants within 2 hours of ordering. The job descriptions on Amazon's employment site do not disclose precise locations of Prime Now facilities within the towns where the positions are based, but the corporation is advertising for positions in Philadelphia; Rydal and Springhouse, Montgomery County; Wayne and Concordville, Delaware County; and in Princeton and Cherry Hill, N.J.



PAST MAY DAYS

Anarchists in Philadelphia have made efforts in the last couple years to express explicitly anarchist sentiments over the past few May Days. With May Day right around the corner, it can be fun look back at past actions on May Day and envision what we can make happen in this celebration of spring, fire, rebellion, and freedom.

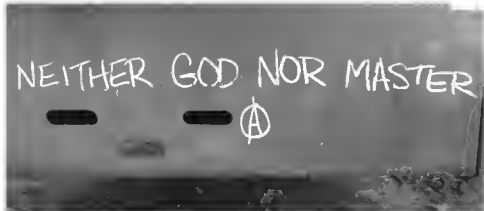
2017: The day started early around 4AM with news of a fire (later deemed an arson) that ravaged a block of OCF Realty-owned buildings under construction. Later that morning, the IWW organized a rally in solidarity with immigrants at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement office. An anarchist and anti-fascist black bloc marched against state violence, imperialism, and fascism. Both groups then joined the larger March for a Day Without Immigrants and People of Color. Some photos of anarchist May Day graffiti surfaced online. In the night a spiky demonstration caused over \$100,000 in damage to yuppie homes, cars, and construction sites in gentrifying Kensington.

2016: An autonomous demonstration in solidarity with prisoners marched through the rainy West Philly morning, leaving behind a trail of fliers, stickers, and graffiti before dispersing. A police substation was vandalized with paint along the way.

2015: A unpermitted march through Center City and parts of South Philly showed their solidarity with revolts against police killings in Baltimore. A screening of "La Commune" accompanied by a meal took place at LAVA space, followed by a discussion about the Paris commune of 1871. After the discussion, bands performed.

2014: Anarchists participated in a larger leftist May Day march, handing out anarchist fliers, wearing and distributing masks, and chanting slogans.

This year there is a call for autonomous actions on and around Mayday. The Philly IWW is calling for a general strike on May first. For the spiritually inclined, Friendly Fire Collective is hosting a retreat May 1-3rd for anti-authoritarian mystics and people of all faiths. How will you celebrate this Mayday? ★



MAY DAY GENERAL STRIKE

Fellow Workers,

Another May is soon to come. May is a special month for working people around the world. It is a time to remember fellow workers martyred for daring to say the common people deserve a say in the trajectory of their lives. Martyred for suggesting people exist with comfort at the expense of profits for business owners. Martyred for dreaming of something better. May is a time when workers come together to experiment for a new world, like the students of Paris in 1968. May is a time when workers rejoice at all they have won, like Philadelphia's Dock Workers Local 8 in 1913. What will May be for you?

On May 1st, 1886, workers across the United States went on strike for an eight-hour workday. On May 3rd, police fired on striking workers at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, killing two. This was only the beginning of violence against working people that May, the most famous incident of which was the sentencing and execution of four workers accused of bombing a gathering of people on May 4th in Haymarket Square, Chicago – these workers were pardoned posthumously by the governor of Illinois in 1893. The trial-execution-pardon cycle has been repeated countless and persists today, though anymore it seems the cycle is execution-trial-pardon with a one-sided trial by media.

May 1st is a day to remember and a day to dream. We workers claim this day for all workers across the globe.

We won the eight-hour workday. We won a guaranteed minimum wage. However, it is increasingly common for people to work multiple jobs, part time, at a wage well below livable. Medicine advances daily, but access to health care is evaporating. A four year college degree is required in more workplaces, but access to education continues to fall for the majority of people. Politicians stand by as our neighborhoods are bull-dozed so developers can build condos we can't afford – letting them stand empty so wealthy investors can store their money.

Amazon threatens to come to town. A neighborhood will be razed to make way for HQ2. Rents will increase – rents we cannot afford. Jeff Bezos and his politicians promise jobs, but we know they only want us in the Amazon warehouses, restaurants, and convenience stores earning minimum

wage. The city has promised Amazon will not pay taxes or for our education.

The Philadelphia Industrial Workers of the World call on you to strike! Walk out with all of your coworkers and enjoy the day. The bosses cannot threaten you if there is no one to take your place.

Strike against police brutality, mass incarceration, and racism.

Strike for justice.

Strike against ICE.

Strike for workers of all nationalities.

Strike against low wages and reduced hours.

Strike for the ability to thrive.

Strike against environmental destruction.

Strike for life.

Strike against gentrification.

Strike for your community.

Strike against disenfranchisement.

Strike for control of your life.

Strike for a future without work.

Strike for imagination.

Strike for yourself.

Strike for those who cannot.

Strike for liberation.

Strike to remember.

Strike for fun. ★

MAY DAY JAWN

Ever since Haymarket Square Mayday has been lit. On this most special day Anarchists celebrate our explosive friendships with dance, music, and hammers. We're calling all crimes against state oppressors, capitalist scum, gendered bull ish, racist enforcers.

This is a call-out for decentralized actions on and around Mayday in Philly. Look around you, do you see something you don't like? Do something you like. Don't forget to bring your friends. Don't forget friends that crime together, crime together.

Happy Mayday, long live Anarchy!

Summer of Rage 2 LOL ★

a recent New York Times article elaborating on the data breach). The control over our lives and decimation of the earth is reliant on the advance of technologies, both bigger and smaller than social media sites and applications – and there are all sorts of dystopian developments that have been recently reported.

Back in 2015, The Atlantic reported people's phones were listening to their televisions to better tailor ads to them. In a world with steady improvements in voice and facial recognition softwares, we regularly acknowledge the uncomfortable reality of different accounts and applications improving on predicting (or prescribing) our desires, and shudder to think of the invasions now present in our lives.

The new video advertisements on bus stops in Philadelphia, in addition to further contributing to light pollution and distractions from what's left of the natural world, contain small cameras half way up on their left sides. Angled in, the cameras are well-positioned to surveil vandals and other dissidents, gauge reactions of ad observers, sense motion to play ads as you approach or make them interactive, and use facial recognition software to tailor ads to you. What they are currently used for is unclear for the moment.

The news of a pedestrian being run over and killed by an "autonomous vehicle" that Uber was testing in Arizona was also sensationalized for the moments that it held our short attention spans, as dictated by the blitzkrieg news-cycle. A report on this doubles down in mentioning that the city of Las Vegas wants to deploy WiFi-connected autonomous vehicles to roam and monitor the streets. It was also around the same time that Google announced that its "autonomous car" division, called Waymo, would be testing automated semis in Atlanta. Besides the obvious threat to living beings that dare cross a street (though automated vehicles don't

have a monopoly on that), driverless cars also discourage actual human ability to perform simple tasks – and we've already seen the erasure of knowledge pertaining to many of the processes, like acquiring food, that are so necessary to sustaining our lives.

This inability to operate free of the techno-industrial system that capitalism has built up around us, and our reliance on those oppressive institutions that carve up the world for its use, was previously addressed by communication theorists Gilles Dauvé & Karl Nesic:

"The industrial world leaves no [...] space for an alternative...Modern workers have been unable to set up any reorganized social life that would rival normal or purely capitalist capitalism for a durable length of time. No room for a Third Way any more."

Indeed it is not only necessary to abolish the social relations that create and maintain a world of workers, but also the infrastructures that advance the colonization of every inch of the planet – a world where we remain constantly "connected" and "plugged in" by an ever-growing series of cables and towers.

To that end, a new study found that big cats and dozens of other threatened mammal species haven't been on such a steady decline in areas where there isn't much human disturbance – in particular, in places where you can't get any cell phone coverage – which speaks volumes on the impact of technological infrastructure on life during this, the human-induced Sixth Great Extinction. Meanwhile, building on the corporate practice that began decades ago of acquiring patents on DNA, scientists have recently begun to speculate about the "disenhancement" of livestock animals to remove their ability to feel pain – intent on actualizing genetically modified nightmares.

Human animals continue to struggle to find "optimal life satisfaction," according to the

Captivate Network, reporting on its ubiquitous office-building elevator screens that earning \$65-\$95 thousand dollars a year is required in order to do so. In attempting to address the stress-induced illnesses and suicides that result from the overwork needed for people to accrue such funds, the South Korean government recently announced its initiative to shut off government office computers by 8pm on Fridays. This, of course, hardly seems like a reprieve.

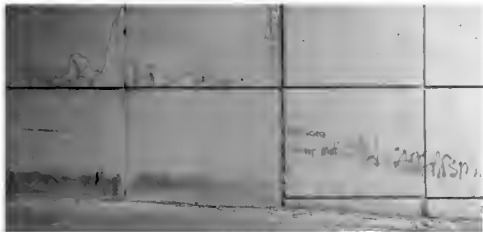
With the approaching "workers' holiday" that is May Day, it might be important to remember John Zerzan's recent words that "civilization is always more work" – and work is the capitalist means of reproducing a society intent on control. It is a functional necessity of states, capital and civilization, in fact, to maintain a steady suppression of our dreams and desires – keeping us plugged in and at work – while offering enough commodified excursions to dissuade us from killing ourselves or rising up in revolt against the totality. ★

RIP PZS

It is with heavy hearts that we learned that Paul Z Simons passed away on March 30th from a heart attack. We've printed some of his writings in past issues and we want to take the time to remember and commemorate him.

Paul was an energetic and passionate contributor to a lived anarchy. His pieces on play and black anarchy (reprinted in previous issues) strongly resonated with us. Some of us have shared conversations with him – ranging from the importance of care to the ease of stealing from large corporations – that continue to provide inspiration. Paul Z Simons was a lifelong illegalist, born illegally to an unwed mother in Utah, becoming radicalized in NYC's Lower East Side squatter scene, and continuing to live a life of rebellion well into his fifties.

His approach to revolt was non-dogmatic and nuanced; he is one of few post-left anarchists to show support for the democratic cantons of the Rojava Revolution. Despite a trend among anarchists to either leave behind or greatly reduce their anarchic practice, Paul never aged out or chilled out, continuing to travel, rebel, and spread anarchy. He will be missed. ★



ATTACK COPS, ADVISES BLOTTER

"The juvenile complied with police instruction and allowed [Officer John] Flinn to handcuff her when he struck her twice on the side of the face causing her to cry out in pain," in Gloucester Township, New Jersey on March 8th.

A video shows New Jersey State Trooper Joseph Drew conducting a roadside strip search, also on March 8th, after he had pulled a car over for tailgating and claimed to smell marijuana. The trooper is seen pulling on blue latex gloves, reaching into the driver's underwear, and groping his genitals and buttocks while the two stand on Route 206 in Southampton, Burlington County. All the while, trucks and cars pass by on the busy highway, and the driver can be heard protesting that he is being sexually assaulted as the trooper repeatedly touches his genitals during a four-minute search of the

man's underwear.

Sacramento Police murdered a black man named Stephon Clark while he carried a shower head on March 18th, and there are officially no charges against the cops who similarly murdered Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, LA. In Portland, Oregon, eight officers were involved in the killing of a homeless man inside a shelter; while at least four of them have a history of excessive force, one cop in particular was previously involved in the killing of an unarmed black man during a traffic stop.

Two years before arresting the rapper Meek Mill on drug and gun charges, then-Philadelphia Police Officer Reginald Graham stole money in a drug bust and later lied to the FBI about the theft, according to a confidential internal police report. Meanwhile, the seemingly arbitrary absence of many PPD officers from the District Attorney's list of 29 cops not fit to



be witnesses in local courts has led the list to come under question for only cataloging officer transgressions since 2016, and omitting many officers with the same violent transgressions as those on the list in that timespan. ★

ON COMMUNIKES

In the last month a number of actions have been accompanied by communiques. A communique is a statement made by a group or individual that can be used to explain an action (or series of actions). Some demonstrations in the last years have been followed up with reportbacks. Reportbacks are texts that go over how a demonstration went and can be used to share analysis, thoughts, and opinions.

The mainstream media is not interested in expanding the general public's rebellious imagination and often ignores actions against oppressors; when the media does cover anarchistic action they will always side with authority, either from a conservative or liberal perspective. Journalists and media representatives may be less interested in preserving someone's anonymity than putting out a good story; there are no guarantees that information they gather won't be handed over with enough pressure from law enforcement. The media cannot be entrusted with accurately and safely representing liberatory action. Communiques and reportbacks are a way for people to take their communication into their own hands, without relying on the media.

For years now anarchists in Philadelphia have claimed responsibility for their more clandestine actions using anonymous communiques. These writings have allowed for anarchists to explain why (and sometimes how) they took the actions they did, express their solidarity with rebels or oppressed people, and make their actions known. Reportbacks following demonstrations have served a similar purpose.

A communique can reveal the motives, ideas, and emotions behind an action in a clearer, more specific way than any spray-painted slogan ever could. An action accompanied by a communique


is differentiated from the din and randomness of the city; it is given meaning. This may not always be the best thing; there are certainly contexts where an action is easily understood by anyone who sees it, or conversation and propaganda make the ideas surrounding the action commonplace. A communique can be a place to put forward a more specific perspective - a communist anarchist may attack a bank because she feels the bank prevents her from sharing with those around her, another anarchist might attack the same bank to express solidarity with a friend overseas facing repression; written communication via communique is what would differentiate these otherwise identical actions.

Anarchists have been debating the merits of publishing communiques and writing reportbacks for years. Causeur Publishing recently put out a zine entitled *Pen & Pistol* that presents two sides of the dialogue around communication, anonymity, and anarchist action. Some feel that for insurrection to burst forth, anarchist action should be indistinguishable from the everyday rebellion of everyone else; others advocate for honest communication alongside actions to prevent them from being recuperated by the media and the left. The debate surrounding these topics will surely continue for years to come, hopefully deepening and elaborating anarchist ideas.

How to publish a communique:

Most communiques and reportbacks from Philly have been shared on itsgoingdown.org or phlanticap.noblogs.org (although a few have been seen on other sites as well). There's no perfect way to anonymously send a communique but there are ways to be safer about it. Phlanticap recommends using TOR, an anonymous web browser, with Guerrilla Mail, an anonymous email service, to send them an email. Other anonymous email services include anonymousemail.me and send-email.org. Its Going Down recommends sending anonymous contributions by using TOR to access their hidden service website at igdnwsdijfng7kxu.onion then clicking Contribute!

To learn more about internet security and anonymity a good place to start is a zine called "London Calling: a cellphone and internet security primer for the criminally-minded anarchist." ★



Like any animal I need
Something in the morning
To rouse me
The joy of my friends
Against this Fidelity Investments notebook
A gift from my brother
I use for its hard back
To rouse me
To lose myself against image
Against the trading brokerage of choice
I need a patch I need a sticker
I need a sticker and a new world
No splendor untainted
Is this mourning naïve? Selfish?
To want the apple
To propagate itself
To want the syrup and the songs
I do not believe we know
What will come of any action
Considered or directed or righteous as it may be
Desire is not will
Fidelity to what?
There must be pleasure
Eating and shitting and fighting and fucking
With this marking and with this fire
The flood through which the blood runs
Knowing the thing by its disappearance
The palpability in lack
Bathing in the backwash of our cities
Wading in toxic waters
My phone beeps
I read the news
We used to throw trash into the ocean
We're more subtle now
I slip into my microfibre
I get ready for work